

NEWSWEEK
2 April 1984

FOREIGN POLICY

Congress Talks Back

'Pure and Simple': The administration's handling of the Salvadoran aid request was similarly graceless. The White House began the week with rhetorical broadsides in support of the \$93 million measure. "I believe it is being either naive or down-right phony to express concern for human rights while pursuing policies that lead to the overthrow of less-than-perfect democracies by Marxist dictatorships, which systematically crush all human rights," Reagan

himself told an audience of Cuban-Americans. Although many people think the trouble in Central America has been caused, at least in part, by widespread injustice, Reagan blamed it all on "a power play by Cuba and the Soviet Union, pure and simple."

Retraction: Opponents of the administration said it was trying to push the aid package through Congress in a hurry, for fear that Roberto D'Aubuisson, the alleged godfather of the right-wing death squads, might win the presidency in El Salvador, making further U.S. aid unlikely. But some of the critics came a cropper. Robert White, the former U.S. ambassador to El Salvador who has conducted a passionate crusade against Reagan's policy, was tripped up when he appeared before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. In February, White named six Salvadoran émigrés in Miami who, he said, were helping to organize and finance the death squads. When White arrived at last week's hearing, one of the men on his list, Arturo Muyschondt, 35, popped up alongside him. Muyschondt denied that he had any connection with the death squads, and his lawyer said White was being sued for \$10 million. The former ambassador conceded: "It appears my source may have been in error" about Muyschondt.

In another embarrassment for Reagan's foes, it was revealed that a former Salvadoran officer had been promised \$50,000 for information connecting D'Aubuisson to the death squads. The informant, whose identity was an ill-kept secret, told his story to members of Congress, to The New York Times and to CBS News. Two weeks

ago, NEWSWEEK identified him as retired Col. Roberto Eulalio Santivañez, once D'Aubuisson's boss in the security apparatus. Although people who knew him described Santivañez as an unsavory character, parts of his story rang true. But it did not help his credibility when the Times disclosed that Santivañez had been offered a financial "safety net" by a group of liberals, including White and Massachusetts businessman Philippe Villers.

Another of the tales told by Santivañez came out in time to embarrass the administration on the eve of the Salvadoran election. The informer claimed that Col. Nicolás Carranza, head of El Salvador's Treasury Police, one of the more notorious security services, was on the payroll of the Central Intelligence Agency. Previously, Santivañez had linked Carranza to the death squads. The CIA declined to comment, but the Times said other U.S. officials had confirmed that Carranza "received more than \$90,000 a year from the CIA as an informant for the last five or six years." Carranza insisted: "I don't know anyone in the CIA, nor have I ever accepted money from the U.S." He also said he was not involved with the death squads.

The propaganda blasts from both sides did not seem to change many minds in Congress. Eventually, Shultz and Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker worked out a compromise with the Democrats. The aid for El Salvador was cut back to \$61.7 million, still a political plus for the administration. Then, to the dismay of the Republican negotiators, the White House repudiated



Anne Nelson

Carranza: Death-squad chief, CIA agent—or neither?

the deal. The culprit proved to be McFarlane, who had not been consulted on every detail. Complained one Republican source in the Senate: "They just will not let Shultz act like a secretary of state." Soon the compromise was put back together again. But the aid package—together with \$21 million for anti-Marxist rebels in Nicaragua—will not be voted on until this week at the earliest, when results come in from El Salvador's election. And if D'Aubuisson ends up in a runoff with moderate José Napoleón Duarte, Congress may decide to wait another six weeks or so for the final outcome before deciding whether to assist the new Salvadoran government.

War Game: The prospect of further delays during a runoff troubled the administration, which feared that leftist guerrillas would step up their attacks against a Salvadoran Army that is running out of ammunition. Perhaps as a show of support for its Salvadoran friends, the administration advanced the date of Grenadero I, a military exercise it had planned to conduct later this spring in neighboring Honduras. The exercise will bring 800 more U.S. troops to the region by April 1, when the runoff campaign may be under way. The maneuvers, accompanied by the construction of two more airstrips in Honduras, could cause new friction with Congress over the U.S. military buildup in Central America. Only a few months ago, the White House was hoping for bipartisan support from Congress on El Salvador and other foreign-policy issues. But with an election looming and with Reagan's diplomacy in conspicuous disarray, the president can no longer count on his political opponents—or even all of his allies—to back his play in every trouble spot.

RUSSELL WATSON with JOHN J. LINDSAY and JOHN WALCOTT in Washington and bureau reports



Harry Mattison—Gamma-Liaison

White: 'In error'